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# SERVICE

## USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE · OFFICE OF INFORMATION · WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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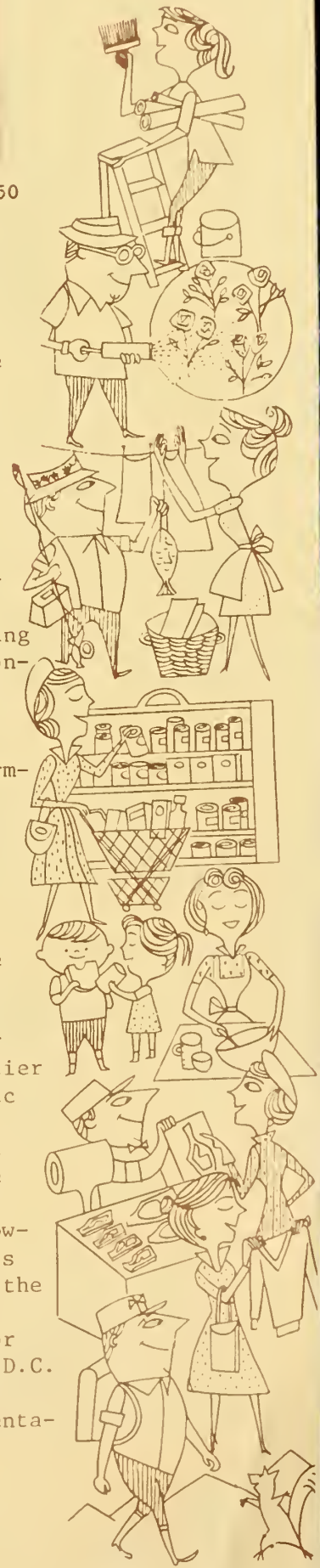
BROWN BAG LUNCHES

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May Contain More Than Food. You miss a couple of days work because of "a flu bug" or the kids come home from school suffering from "a bug that's going around". Maybe so. Maybe not. The bug may well have been a mild case of food poisoning. And you may have sent it to work or school in that innocent brown bag lunch. Most germs that cause food poisoning are killed when the food is cooked. But some germs that produce poisons are not destroyed by heat or they can be introduced when foods are handled after cooking. Leaving food at room temperatures for more than 2 hours, including preparation time, allows these germs to grow to dangerous numbers. Brown bag lunches can provide them a prime environment. The key to packing a safe brown bag lunch is simple: Good, sensible sanitation, personal hygiene, and sound food care. Some practical tips on packing a safe lunch are included in the fact sheet "Safe Brown Bag Lunches" issued by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. For single free copies of the fact sheet and of other food safety information write to APHIS Information Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

### LIMITLESS RESOURCES

Within Limits. "The country is limitless and full of inexhaustible resources." So wrote French historian de Tocqueville of his visit to the U.S. in the 1830's. So thought most Americans. They could always move on when land became unproductive or forests gave out or game became scarce. But it became apparent that, just as the frontier had a geographic limit, the soil, water, timber, wildlife and scenic beauty also had limits. A new slide set produced by USDA's Soil Conservation Service traces the growing awareness of Americans that the nation's natural resources were not inexhaustible and had to be protected against exploitation. The short (15 minutes) history of conservation in the U.S., entitled "Limits," is appropriate for showing to all audiences interested in conservation and in our country's history. Copies of the slide set can be purchased for \$20.50 from the Photography Division, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. A filmstrip can be ordered for \$12.50 from Photo Lab, Inc., 3825 Georgia Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20011. A programmed cassette with soundtrack and two copies of an illustrated narrative guide are included in the price of both presentations.



Effective in February. Revised federal beef grade standards will go into effect February 23, 1976, following several months of court proceedings. Use of the revised beef standards has been delayed since last April when a U.S. District Court issued an injunction preventing their implementation. Higher courts have since ruled in USDA's favor and the injunction was lifted. Federal grading of beef is, by the way, a voluntary program and users pay a fee for the service. According to USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, which establishes the beef grades and conducts grading activity, there are four major changes included in the revised standards. Briefly, they are: (1) All beef carcasses graded will be graded for both quality (grades such as U.S. Prime, Choice and Good which identify the eating quality of beef) and yield (grades numbered 1 through 5 which indicate the percentage of retail cuts in a carcass). Prior to the revision, beef carcasses could be graded either for quality or yield, or both. Officials expect the yield grading provision to encourage producers to raise meat-type cattle with a minimum of excess fat. (2) Conformation (shape of carcass) will be eliminated as a factor in determining the quality grades. Research shows that conformation does not affect the palatability of beef. However, variations in conformation do effect yields of retail cuts and will be precisely measured by the yield grades. (3) Slight reductions in the marbling requirements (flecks of fat within the lean) will result in slightly leaner beef qualifying for U.S. Prime and Choice. Previously, increased marbling was required to compensate for increased maturity. In other words, the older the beef, the more marbling required. However, recent research conducted at a number of state universities indicates that there is no significant difference in eating quality of beef from cattle about 9 to 30 months of age. So, the minimum amount of marbling in Prime and Choice grades of beef from cattle in this age range will be the same as that previously required for beef from cattle about 9 months old. (4) U.S. Good grade has been redesigned to make it much more restrictive and more consistent in eating quality. The revised standards are available from the Livestock Division, AMS, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## CARPET BEETLES EAT WOOL

Alone or En Casserole. Black carpet beetles are highly-destructive, wool-eating pests. Despite their name, they do not limit themselves to carpets, but will take their wool anywhere they find it -- in pants, shirts, skirts, scarves, coats. Nor are they particular whether it is all wool. Recently, USDA scientists fed a variety of wool-blend fabrics to carpet beetle larvae. The pest's favorite was a fabric casserole of 50-percent wool, 20-percent polyester fiber, 19-percent nylon, and 11-percent cotton. The larvae displayed other interesting preferences, too. When the warp yarns were made of wool and the filling yarns of a synthetic fiber, or vice-versa, the larvae ate the wool and left the man-made fibers alone. When the fabrics contained yarns made of a blend of wool and synthetic fibers, the larvae bit off pieces of the yarn and swallowed both the wool and the synthetic. Although examination disclosed that the synthetic fibers were not digested, the beetles apparently will eat synthetics whether they are good for them or not. Wise consumers mothproof their woolens. The scientists point out that the same precautions should be taken with the wool-synthetic blends, which appear to be as appetizing an entree to carpet beetles as the woolens.



## ON THE HOOF TO ON THE PLATE

And The Costs Inbetween. Farmers are selling cattle for about 40 cents a pound, yet you pay over \$2.00 a pound for a T-bone steak. Why the difference? The explanation lies in the costs involved in transforming a steer on the hoof into the steak on your plate. It starts when the farmer sells his 1,000-pound steer for 40 cents a pound, or \$400. The packer slaughters the animal and is left with a 620-pound carcass. The carcass is still worth only \$400, but the value per pound is higher -- 65 cents a pound -- because the carcass is smaller. The carcass must then be cut and packaged for retailing. By the time some bone and fat are removed and some moisture and meat are lost during the process, only about 440 pounds of salable meat is left. This meat is now valued at 91 cents a pound. To the 91 cents is added the processing, transportation, and marketing costs: 8 cents a pound for slaughtering; 4 cents for transportation from packing house to the retail store; 21 cents for labor to cut the carcass into retail cuts and packaging it for sale; 4 cents for the packaging materials; and 3 cents for advertising. Add on a little profit for the firms along the way and you have a figure of \$1.40 a pound for the 440 pounds of usable meat. So, where is the other 60 cents of the \$2.00 T-bone? That steer the farmer sold produced a mere 16 pounds of T-bone steak. The other 424 pounds of meat were mostly cuts that sell at lower prices -- chuck steak and roast, stew meat, hamburger, short-ribs, and shanks, for example. If you average all the hamburger at, say, 85 cents a pound, the T-bone at \$2.00, and all other cuts at various prices, you come out with \$1.40 a pound. Basically, it is whether you want to wrestle a 40-cents-a-pound T-bone from a 1,000-pound steer or pick up a pre-packaged, ready-to-cook \$2.00-a-pound T-bone from a meat counter.

## THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

What It Is and How It Works. Most people have heard about the Food Stamp Program and how it can help stretch food dollars. What many people do not know is how the program works, who is eligible, or whether they themselves might qualify. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has prepared a booklet which explains many details of the program and answers frequently asked questions. Among other things, the 16-page booklet gives information on the purchase and use of food stamps, the administration of the program, responsibility of recipients, and other related issues such as meals-on-wheels and food during disaster situations. Single free copies of "The Food Stamp Program" (PA-1123) are available from local welfare offices or from the Consumer Information Center, Dept. 75, Pueblo, Colorado 81009.

## AVALANCHE!

When the Snow Comes Tumbling Down. Snow avalanches occur by the thousands every winter in mountainous country. The more time you spend in skiing, snowmobiling and enjoying other winter activities in the mountains, the greater the chance of your being caught in one. Experts do not fully understand all the causes of snow avalanches nor can anyone predict avalanche conditions with certainty. However, there are certain signs, terrain factors, and weather conditions that can alert a thinking observer to potential hazard. Some general guidelines to help you judge the presence and degree of avalanche danger -- and avoid them -- are included in a folder prepared by USDA's Forest Service. For a copy of the folder, "Snow Avalanche," (PA-1090) write to the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## FmHA LOAN PROGRAMS

Improve or Repair. A rural homeowner whose house needs fixing up may be eligible for one of two "fix-it-up" loans from USDA's Farmers Home Administration. The two FmHA programs are the home repair loan and the home improvement loan. Generally, home repair loans may be used to remove health or safety hazards by repairing roofs, providing water and waste disposal systems, installing screens, windows, or insulation, or other steps to make the home safe. Home improvement loans may include similar purposes, but can go further by bringing the home up to minimum property standards and making changes for the convenience of the family, such as adding a room, remodeling the kitchen or otherwise modernizing the house. A borrower's income is the key to the type of loan for which he may qualify. For instance, a family with a very low income may borrow up to \$5,000 to remove health hazards; a family with a somewhat higher income can borrow up to \$7,000 to improve their home. FmHA county supervisors will help families determine their eligibility and the type of loan best suited to their needs and incomes. For more information on the home repair and improvement loan programs, contact the local county office of the Farmers Home Administration, listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government - Agriculture," or write to the Farmers Home Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## TIGHTENED BELTS

Lighter on the Scales? We ate less food in 1975 than we did in 1974 -- about 1.2 percent less. Tight supplies and higher food prices, along with a general economic downturn were the causes for this belt tightening, according to a report by USDA's Economic Research Service. Nutritionally, we consumed less too, although the decline in nutrients hardly made a dent in our diets. We ate less nutrient fats, carbohydrates, thiamin, vitamin B12, and phosphorus. We managed this by consuming less pork, poultry, eggs, lard, salad and cooking oils and refined sugar. Not all nutrients declined however. We downed three percent more ascorbic acid (vitamin C) than a year earlier -- mainly by drinking more frozen orange juice. And we ate about the same amount of protein as usual -- 99 grams, well above the average nutritional needs of the population. Of this protein, more than two-thirds was supplied by animal products with milk and beef making up the biggest share.

## PLEASE SEND THE LABEL

For Changes. Be sure to send along the address label from SERVICE if you are moving, changing your name, or otherwise altering your mailing address. Having the label enables us to make the proper changes more quickly and accurately.

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